

## *The Power of a Silent Retreat*

By Fr. Eugene Hemrick

Are you seeking wholeness or more focus in your life? If so, may I suggest making a retreat – one emphasizing silence.

Having led a good number of retreats that involve long periods of silence and experienced their impact, I cannot emphasize strongly enough the potential this has for getting us in touch with God, ourselves and one another.

Unlike any other therapeutic means available today, silent retreats create a sacred, meditative atmosphere that is perfect for knowing God better, coming to grips with ourselves and, for some mysterious reason, opening us up to others, especially close loved ones.

But don't take it for granted that going off to a retreat house in a quiet, isolated place automatically guarantees quiet time for meditation. More often than not, retreat time is filled with talks, group discussions and exercises. Make sure, even demand, that your retreat schedule will allow great quantities of silent time!

Before making a retreat, find a book that specifically addresses the virtue of silence, and let it move you into the mood of the awesome power of silence.

One excellent way to appreciate these powers is to better understand the word's root meaning. "Silence" comes from the Latin word "silens," meaning stillness. Stillness, the renowned theologian Father Romano Guardini told us, "is the tranquility of the inner life; the quiet at the depths of its hidden streams. It is collected, total presence, a being 'all there,' receptive, alert, ready.... It is when the soul abandons the restlessness of purposeful activity."

Father Guardini counseled us that only the person who knows how to be silent knows how to speak.

Paul Ricoeur waxed poetically about the relationship of silence to speech when he said, "Speech must die to serve that which is spoken."

Another excellent way to appreciate stillness is to recall synonyms such as the word "calm," which in Greek means "heat of the day." Here we have the picture of a resting place at high noon, a spot that is placid, restful and cool. Notice how it is antithetical to being rushed or bombarded by noise and commotion. It is that which protects our senses, and I might add our sanity.

As helpful as lectures, discussions and educational games can be during retreats. I believe they should be kept to a minimum for a retreat to be truly effective. In any event, silence represents a true change of place.

After all, most of our daily activities drown out silence. Whether we are riding on a quiet, comfortable train, in our car or sitting in a sound proof office, stillness is very difficult to achieve. Life today means continuous activity, surround-sound and perpetual stimulation. Through no fault of our own, this dulls our taste for silence.

And it is no exaggeration to say that silence is featured by many of us because we think it takes us out of the mainstream of the so-called "good life." We cling to the roar of the crowd or the excitement of a home entertainment center.

If we are ever going to really experience the peace we offer each other at Mass, we need to achieve stillness, and there is no better place to find this than on a retreat, especially a silent one.

## Mission Statement

Loyola House of Retreats  
is inspired by the person and  
Good News of Jesus Christ  
in the tradition of the *Spiritual  
Exercises* of St. Ignatius  
Loyola.

The Jesuit and lay staff is  
committed  
to providing spiritual retreats  
and spiritual support  
to laity, religious, and clergy  
of all ages and cultures  
in a contemplative  
atmosphere.

We desire to foster growth  
in the Gospel freedom and  
spiritual fire necessary for the  
modern day apostle.

## Loyola House of Retreats The Jesuit Retreat

### “The Power of a Silent Retreat”



*“The essential thing is not what we say but  
what God says to us and through us. In  
that silence, He will listen to us; there He  
will speak to our soul, and there we will  
hear His voice.”*

(Mother Theresa of Calcutta)

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